

PROJECT TITLE: Fire Management Planning for Wildlife Habitat

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COOPERATORS: Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR), Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Chugachmiut Corporation, National Park Service (NPS), Tanana Chiefs Conference, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS), and U.S. Forest Service (USFS)

GRANT AND SEGMENT NR.: Grant W-27-4

PROJECT NR.: Project 20.0

SEGMENT PERIOD: 1 July 2000–30 June 2001

WORK LOCATION: Statewide

STATE: Alaska

I. PROGRESS ON PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Objective 1: Foster cooperation, coordination and communication between agencies, private entities and the public on wildland fire and related activities, including prescribed fire.

A provision in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 led to formation of a planning group composed of representatives from land and resource management agencies (including ADF&G), fire suppression organizations, and regional Native corporations to organize and coordinate interagency fire management. Eventually, two working groups evolved: (1) the Alaska Interagency Fire Management Council (AIFMC); and (2) the Multi-Agency Coordinating (MAC) group. The AIFMC addressed fire planning, fire weather data collection, fire management data archiving and use, prescribed fire, fire prevention and non-suppression fire management issues and research needs. The MAC group addressed Type I team selection, alteration of evaluation dates for modified management option areas, open burning restrictions, suppression priorities during periods of suppression resource shortages, and emergency departures from planned responses. In May 1995, the Alaska Wildland Fire Coordination Group (AWFCG), newly formed through a Memorandum of Understanding, assumed the responsibilities of these two groups. I have been the department's representative on the AWFCG and its predecessors since 1987. Tom Paragi serves as the department's alternate. We continued to represent the department at AWFCG sponsored meetings during this reporting period.

Objective 2: Develop, and periodically update, a statewide Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan.

Thirteen area-specific Interagency Fire Management Plans were prepared between 1980 and 1988 to provide a coordinated and cost effective approach to fire management on all lands in Alaska. In October 1998, these plans and subsequent amendments were consolidated into one plan called the Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan (AIWFMP). As a representative on the AWFCG, I participated in reviewing the AIWFMP during this reporting period.

Objective 3: Encourage development of state and federal fire management policies, procedures and programs that maintain or enhance ecosystem functions, wildlife populations and opportunities for human use of the wildlife resource.

Historically, fire policies have been shaped by society's demand for protection of human life and property. The beneficial and necessary aspects of wildland fire were largely ignored or downplayed. We have worked with state and federal managers since 1980 to develop fire policies that balance human protection needs with those of the ecosystem and its wildlife. In many cases, interagency fire planning has been the impetus for change in both wildland and prescribed fire policies. However, we have also provided comments directly to the Department of Interior when national events have triggered a policy review. During this reporting period, we worked with the ADNDR-Division of Forestry (DOF) to develop a state Prescribed Fire Protocol.

Objective 4: Obtain fire management decisions that benefit wildlife.

We continued to work with land and fire managers on a fire-by-fire basis during the fire season to obtain fire management decisions that benefit wildlife and other ecosystem values without unduly compromising people's need for protection of life and property. We also helped set the sideboards for fire decisions by participating in pre-season fire planning. We also participated, on the department's behalf, in MAC group decisions.

Objective 5: Identify potential and appropriate funding sources and staff to support interagency fire management projects.

We continued to participate on the AWFCG's Research and Applications Committee and the Fire Effects Working Group to identify and prioritize fire-related research needs in Alaska, identify potential funding sources, and encourage research that addresses mutually agreed upon needs. We also worked separately with managers and researchers in other institutions to support and encourage projects of mutual interest and concern.

II. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED ON JOBS IDENTIFIED IN ANNUAL PLAN THIS PERIOD

Job 1: Represent the department at interagency or public fire management planning and coordination meetings.

We represented the department at the quarterly meetings of the AWFCG. We also participated on the AWFCG's Fire Research and Applications Committee and Fire Effects Working Group.

We attended the DOF Fall Fire Review in Palmer on 10-11 October 2000 and the AWFCG sponsored Interagency Fall Fire Review in Anchorage on 24-25 October 2000.

We reiterated department concern that suppression agencies were not doing enough to avoid problems with bears at fire camps or to prepare fire fighters for possible encounters with bears. The DOF considered purchasing cracker shells, rubber bullets, beanbag shot, or other similar devices to issue when a bear problem develops at a fire. They also may acquire one of the commercially produced, portable electric fence kits to test where food storage attracts bears. Both DOF and the BLM-Alaska Fire Service ordered the newly produced "Safety in Bear Country" video set for training fire staff.

No changes were made to the AIWFMP, as amended October 1998. We did not participate on other fire planning teams or review other wildland fire planning documents during the reporting period. Prescribed fire planning efforts are reported in the Annual Performance Report for Study 20.0, *"Alaska Wildlife Habitat Enhancement."*

The AWFCG met on 10 July 2000 to consider converting the Modified Management Option areas to Limited Management for the remainder of the fire season per the AIWFMP. The group decided to convert from Modified to Limited at noon on 10 July 2000.

Job 2: Annually evaluate and comment on the selection of fire management options under the AIWFMP, and recommend changes that will provide additional opportunities for wildlife resources to benefit from the management of wildland fires.

We submitted a proposal to BLM and ADNR to change some of the Modified Management Option areas on Minto Flats to Limited Management. Review of this proposal was not completed before the summer 2001 fire season.

We continued to encourage ADNR and the BLM to adopt changes in the Wildland Fire Management Options that were first proposed for lands northwest of Tok in 1999. These changes were not adopted before the summer 2001 fire season.

Job 3: Work with state and federal managers to modify existing policies, procedures and programs to use fire to maintain or enhance wildlife habitat.

We continued to use our representation on the AWFCG to push for changes in state and federal policies, procedures and programs to allow more flexibility to use fire to maintain or enhance wildlife habitat. Currently, we are devoting considerable effort toward

development of a state Prescribed Fire Protocol. This aspect is reported separately under a related project (see the Annual Performance Report for Study 20.0, "*Alaska Wildlife Habitat Enhancement*").

Job 4: Facilitate department staff involvement in fire-related issues.

We discussed the status of the Wildland Fire Management Options (ref. AIWFMP, Amended 1998) with the Galena Area Biologist relative to caribou management in the Koyukuk National Wildlife Refuge. We also discussed the status of the Wildland Fire Management Options with the McGrath Area Biologist relative to moose management needs near McGrath.

We conferred with the Delta Area Biologist and Habitat and Restoration Division staff prior to requesting that the AWFCG convert the Modified Management Option areas on the Minto State Game Refuge and the Delta Junction Bison Range to Limited Management for the remainder of the year 2000 fire season.

Job 5: Identify and review appropriate literature, participate in training, and attend symposia or workshops to maintain expertise on fire management issues.

We continued to review literature pertaining to fire management issues. We participated in the University of Alaska Fairbanks Fire Seminar Series during late winter 2001. We did not take any fire-related training courses during the reporting period.

Job 6: Prepare an annual budget, work plan, and documents needed to satisfy Federal Aid and other reporting requirements.

A FY01 Federal Aid Performance Report, and a FY02 budget request and work plan, was submitted.

III. ADDITIONAL FEDERAL AID-FUNDED WORK NOT DESCRIBED ABOVE THAT WAS ACCOMPLISHED ON THIS PROJECT DURING THIS SEGMENT PERIOD

None

IV. FEDERAL AID TOTAL PROJECT COSTS FOR THIS SEGMENT PERIOD

\$34,400

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APPROVAL DATE: _____